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ABSTRACT

The first paper examines the interaction, within a European context, of government and voluntary agencies as actors on a larger societal stage. It attempts to develop basic principles and alternative strategies for their effective interaction in light of different political contexts and government structures. It indicates what sort of factors have to be taken into account when formulating rules of strategy for bringing the struggle for adequate resources for the aged to a reasonable outcome. The second paper examines the alternative strategies open to voluntary agencies depending on the societal context, from a U.S. viewpoint. It puts forth a strong case for the voluntary sector's leading a revolution in social values which will result in qualitative improvements in the lives of elderly people. Moreover, agencies should do their best to direct the forces of social change into constructive rather than destructive channels. (Author/SE)

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THE VOLUNTARY AGENCY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Effective Advocacy on Behalf of the Aging

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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The *International Federation on Ageing* is an association of voluntary organizations that either represent the elderly as their advocate and provide services to them. It came into existence in late 1973 in recognition of the fact that such organizations had much to learn from one another and needed improved national and international representation.

Above all, these organizations sought an international spokesman for the development of solutions to problems associated with aging, and to assist in the transfer and application of knowledge to the practical conditions and problems of the elderly.

THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY AGENCY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE:

Effective Advocacy on Behalf of the Aging

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INTRODUCTION

The two papers presented in this volume were delivered at a symposium organized by the International Federation on Ageing, in conjunction with the 10th International Congress of Gerontology on June 22, 1975. The theme was "The Role of the Voluntary Agency as an Instrument of Social Change; Effective Advocacy on Behalf of the Aging". There was to have been a third paper to examine this topic from the viewpoint of developing countries, but, unfortunately, Professor Sugata Dasgupta of the Gandhian Institute, India, was unable to attend for pressing personal reasons.

It was appropriate for the IFA to organize this symposium because one of its fundamental missions is to unite voluntary organizations on an international level to serve as an "instrument of social change" on behalf of their aging constituencies.

The strength and relative independence of the voluntary sector differ greatly from country to country. In some countries, voluntary agencies are almost completely dependent on government revenues, yet are able to maintain a lively opposition to programs and policies they consider unworthy; in others, there may be a diminution in advocacy functions as dependency on government increases. In many countries, there is a growing pressure for cooperation among voluntary agencies in order to rationalize use of resources and avoid wasteful duplication. However, this too may carry the threat of reduced social activism on the part of voluntary agencies, if they avoid controversial positions in order to preserve their coalitions and alliances. The voluntary agency is in a state of flux as it confronts the phenomena of centralization - and in some cases, decentralization of government, serious economic constraints, and increased demand for social services. The papers in this volume examine the various ways voluntary agencies may serve as instruments of social change as external circumstances vary.

In the first paper, Professor Jan Beekman examines within a European context, the interaction of government and voluntary agencies as actors on a larger societal stage. He attempts to develop basic principles and alternative strategies for their effective interaction in light of different political contexts and government structures. He also provides some recommendations for issues in which he believes the voluntary sector should take the lead in stimulating societal change.

Bernard Nash examines the alternative strategies open to voluntary agencies, depending on the societal context, from a U.S. viewpoint. He puts forth a strong case for the voluntary sector's leading a revolution in social values which will result in qualitative improvements in the lives of elderly persons.

SOME COMMENTS ON STRATEGIES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES FOR THE AGED

by

Jan F. Beekman, Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Cape Town, Republic of South Africa

"Do not go gentle into that good night
Old age should burn and rave at close of day
Rage, rage, against the dying of light."

Dylan Thomas

Care of the aged, or "aging" as it is now often called, is part of that lot of phenomena in our society which is clearly subject to the process of enlargement of scope. In the case of the aged this enlargement takes several forms. The scope enlarges functionally: health, culture, social services, basic rights are more widely involved; but it also enlarges from the point of view of the responsibility-bearer, i.e. from the family to the community to the society. We take that for granted in every part of the world. In almost any country, regardless of the stage of development we either are worried or are starting to worry.

1. TWO APPROACHES

So, it is society's business. It often struck me that one could compare the field of the care of the aged with the field of the general social services in 19th Century Europe. At that time there were two schools of thought. The first regarded the social problems of the individual and his family as instances where you had to help. The help had to come from outside. Around the year 1900 philosophies emerged, which professed to stimulate self-help, but this particular part of these philosophies was never quite convincing and it is still not quite convincing in 1975. Hence ambiguous feelings about social work.

The other school of thought was based on the essentially Marxist philosophy of uniting and organizing the socially weak people into a strength that could not be disregarded anymore because of the power it represented. Its result in the social field was inter-alia political parties, cooperatives and trade unions. It leads to the development of tools like election campaigns, collective bargaining, price setting, collective buying and selling. It was part of the struggle of the underdog for recognition as a human being through what is essentially self-help.

The two schools of thought have never quite found one another. The first is usually politically conservative; it belongs to the establishment and is based on the assumption that the existing power-structure is responsible for the whole of society. The second refuses to accept this, points out that too many mistakes have been made in the past and that the only viable way toward remedy is to attack evil at its roots.

Care of the aged is in a similar position now, almost a century later. A great number of responsible citizens, not belonging to the category of the aged, or at least not considering themselves as belonging to that group, come together in committees and formal organizations and promote the interests of the aged, that is people different from themselves. This more-or-less represents the first way of thinking I referred to earlier. At the same time, senior citizens unite, become members of a formal organization which requires belonging to a particular age group as a membership criterion. They form a pressure group, somewhat similar to a trade union. In some countries they may even try a political party and contest seats in representative bodies. In Holland this happened in local government elections, but without great success. This is the equivalent to the second way of thinking. Relationships between the two types of organizations, which are the result of those two different ways of thinking, are not always as good as they should be. However that may be, both ways of thinking agree to presenting the care of the aged as a business of society as a whole.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONS

Looking back in history, organizations for senior citizens have existed for a long time. In Western Europe, they started as non-governmental agencies on a paternalistic basis. That is to say, the organizations were managed by non-aged, people who belonged to a certain high-level of society, people who therefore had access to public decision-making, but who could only use this influence with discretion. If they were really voluntary, their money came from private sources. In our modern egalitarian democracies such organizations are sympathetic anomalies. They do still exist, they fulfill an admirable function, but they are cultural anomalies. In his analysis of big foundations, Nielsen says of them that they are "like the giraffe; they could not possibly exist, but they do".

More usual is the type of non-governmental organization which is somehow publicly subsidized, with some strings attached to the subsidy. They are also rather strange animals, because they use public money, whereas their public accountability is considerably less than that of a normal public organization.

As a third type of organization, one finds the proper organization of the aged, managed by the aged, supported by the aged on a membership basis, where non-aged can only be a sort of honorary member. They may be subsidized, but if they are, this is usually for special purposes - e.g. for research or for a specific program. Or else they may, if they are sufficiently conformist, give a service and can be paid for that service, either by the community at large or by the users of the service i.e. the aged. They will, however, decidedly act as a pressure group, and, in times of economic low-tide they are easily, sometimes too easily, identifiable as a political nuisance.

And fourth, you have the government. The aged are not usually considered to be an interest that warrants a special government-department. Such a department if it existed, would be client centered and client centered departments are administratively undesirable in any case, let alone a department for the aged. But they can be sub-departments, or sub-sub-departments, according to the structure of the administration. This means two things. First, that the interests of the aged are scattered over several departments, e.g. health, housing,

culture, food, social welfare, and second, that the political strength of those that have to advocate the interest of the aged in the central decision-making of a country is not great. This goes for the national government, but also for the other tiers of government, regardless of the allocation of responsibilities to those tiers.

This is more or less the stage and those are the troops that are at best at your disposal when you want to develop a strategy for the welfare of the aged.

A good systems-theorist, however, knows that people and money are not the only elements in a system. There are many others. There is sentiment - a dangerous one and easy to backfire. There is conscience - less tricky than sentiment, but not altogether reliable. But there is above all the inter-relationship between the powers I mentioned above. Look at the whole field of the aged as a system, of which the non-governmental and governmental organizations are the sub-systems. In that case the sub-systems are to some extent interdependent. Changing, or influencing one sub-system, means changing and influencing the others and thereby the whole system. For our purposes we have to look at the non-governmental agency as the center of the system, simply because the majority of us are involved in such an organization.

This conglomeration of organizations for aged is - when it promotes the interests of a group of the population, representing, say, 7% and 14% of the total population - functioning within the context of a political system. It is in other words a sub-system of the entire social system and thereby of the total political system of a country and has to articulate and diplomatically try to "sell" the interest of the aged. If these organizations want to be effective, they have to unite somehow; that is compromise on internal differences of opinion or minor conflicting issues, such as political partisanship, religious ideologies, pensionholders' interest and interests of people who are not in such a position, etc., as well as issues such as functioning as a pressure group or belonging to the establishment and even on the issue of being governmental or non-governmental . This may have to include a formal machinery to solve conflicts and to offer arbitration, such as a national council for aged where everybody can find a forum. These do exist in western European countries, but not all of them are strong because of internal disharmony. Lack of funds, lack of prestige, organizational amateurism, bad public relations and a certain shyness about being involved in the political power-struggle are some of the reasons for this condition.

It is with this type of organization, functioning in a context I have tried to sketch that my contribution chiefly deals. It represents a typically western-European set-up and cannot easily be imitated in entirely different cultural traditions. As such it is one sided. On the other hand, human behavior also has a universal aspect in the sense that under similar conditions, humans tend to react in a similar way. Administrative science shows that the cultural differences between types of organizations tend to decrease. Hence this modest effort to point out some factors that have a more than regional validity, although it is based on western European experience and has no claim whatsoever to be in any way comprehensive.

III. THE OBJECTIVE

The chief objective of the whole movement for the aged is to create interest or to enlarge the interest of society for one particular group in that society with the aim to claim a greater share of available resources for the group which was - as it is expressed in "As You Like It" an "unregarded age in corners thrown". These resources could present a zero-sum situation. In that case the position is a delicate one, because allocating resources to one group means taking those same resources away from another group. One is then in a fighting position.

Fortunately, however, the situation is almost never entirely as bad as that. A country is usually able to mobilize at least some more resources or to make a more efficient use of the existing ones. But it is equally unrealistic to think of resources in money, manpower, equipment, and the like as an all too elastic thing that one can stretch to any great extent. An annual 3.5 - 5% increment is a fair rule of thumb to reckon with. Under normal conditions, with normal levels of public appeal, strength in public relations and a strong organizational set-up, every section of society gets a more-or-less fair and equal share. That fair share is the result of incremental bargaining about an incrementally growing reservoir of resources.

To achieve the fair increment, however, means playing the power game according to the rules and generally within the limits of those rules. The law of the country and the philosophy of the profession set limitations to the methods that can be used. In the case of the aged, for instance, blackmail through sentimentality and playing on the instrument of the public conscience is only admissible in a discreet and very mild form.

Fundamentally, this game can only be played with success if you succeed in bringing elements of your field together in a logical and cohesive pattern. By elements I mean your philosophy, scientific knowledge, a good and valid concept of your role in society, a sound organizational skill and, particularly, a fundamental grasp as to the effects of pulling particular strings, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of those strings and their sensitivity to change.

If we, on the other hand, assume that the aged require an increase in resources beyond this 3.5 - 5% increment, we have to think of extraordinary measures.

It is the experience of western European countries that it is extremely difficult to change the budget of an organization of the HEW type by more than 5 - 10% over one year. Only unusual circumstances, such as a real threat or a catastrophe or an entirely new phenomenon, can bring that about. A good case has to be made and decisions on such matters usually lie with the government. Here again, even more than in a case of bargaining for normal increments, one finds oneself in the middle of a power game.

IV. STRATEGY

Permit me to make some comments on that power game and to outline some of its ramifications for a non-governmental agency for the aged. Let us assume that a national organization for the aged has done its homework well. It has defined its objectives, decided on its priorities, its model of decision-making (rational or non-rational) and it has finally come to a realistic program for

a number of years. Now it is going to implement it. It will partly do it by its own means through the service programs of membership. Partly, however, the government has to do the work or to provide more funds. Here one can choose two different strategies. One can either approach political parties and their representatives in Parliament or one can go to decision-makers in the administrative sector.

(a) Politicians

In the first case one has to distinguish between a situation where a multi-party system is found and a political situation with a two party system (or even in some countries a one-party system). In a multi-party system there is ample scope for bargaining with the political parties, because the care for the aged is just the type of subject where the strangest coalitions are possible; a prerequisite of course, is that the aged are accepted as a non-partisan group.

In a two-party system the scope is less large. Here the political parties tend to limit their contacts with specific interest groups and try instead to combine the interest of a number of groups into an important aspect of the general interest. This is even truer of a one-party system.

The conclusion is clear. A non-governmental agency that has as its main objective the promotion of the care for the aged has a better chance to win support from political parties when political fragmentation exists in the country. The chances in France are better than in Britain, for example.

Another principle is that an interest considered to be "weak" - the aged are such an interest - has a better chance to be adopted by a political party than an interest that is considered "strong". A political party will think twice before it is going to be specific in its program on an issue which is already being articulated by a strong professional group and which requires a large amount of expertise and technical knowledge. A specific and precise program carries an unduly high political risk.

(b) The Civil Servant

The other possibility in the strategy is to approach decision-making people in the hierarchy of officialdom: the civil servants. A civil servant, unless he be a specialist and has the interest of the aged as his specific responsibility, is professionally disinclined to be too much influenced by one interest group. His duty is rather to harmonize different interests, which inevitably means to compromise. After all, his duty is to serve the common interest. If, on the other hand, he is a specialist he will listen carefully and, if convinced, turn into a staunch defender of a new program - not necessarily of the non-governmental organization, but of its ideas. Inter-agency competition is often too strong for a civil servant to endorse a particular non-governmental organization.

Now it so happens that there does exist a continuum in the ways the governmental apparatus structures itself in the countries of the world. In some countries, Britain is a good example, the generalists have the main emphasis - not any more to the extent of 20 years ago, but still to a considerable degree. In the American and French decision-making positions, there is much greater emphasis on specialists in decision-making positions. Other countries, steer a middle course. I would suggest that an organization for the aged has a

better chance to make its points with a civil servant if the emphasis in the civil service is on the specialist rather than on the generalist.

Of course, people concerned with the care for the aged in the world do more-or-less act according to this pattern. They simply know that in their situation, their chance of success is better if they approach Mr. X than if they approach Mr. Y. They know their people. But I make these points, because I think that it is important for them to know that there is a structural reason for doing so. They should be able to make a conscious choice between alternative strategies on the basis of professional knowledge in organization theory.

(c) The Weight of Sectional Interests

Every political culture has a philosophy about the importance attributed to sectional interests, like the interest of the aged. The two extremes could be called unitarian and pluralist.

The unitarian philosophy could be said to give comparatively little weight to section interests like the aged; the pluralist would be the contrary. Relatively clear examples would be Britain and Holland respectively.

It has to be recognized that sectional interest is not necessarily less important in theory than general interest. They both deal with justice, equity, human dignity and similar value judgements, which are debatable by definition.

Recognizing this, a National Council for the Aged as it exists today in many countries has to maintain a balance between these two philosophies. On the one hand, it has to harmonize the interest of groups of aged or facets of the welfare of aged, such as the mentally deficient, houseowners, pensioners, chronically ill. On the other hand, it has to remain within the acceptable boundaries of the common interest in order to remain credible in the eyes of the general public and the government. After all, one competes with a great number of other interests, such as education, women's organizations, trade unions, employers, etc. In systems theory one would say that a Council for the Aged is a linking pin between a number of sub-systems and an even bigger number of "super-systems".

Leaving disputes about political theory aside, one must expect of the parliamentarian or the civil servant, who is to be persuaded, that he sees his role as that of a more or less generally informed and basically impartial quasi-judicial instrument, who has the unenviable task of identifying and then harmonizing sectional interests. He has relative freedom however, to be an advocate for those interests that have convinced him they belong to a reasonable general well-being. Again the aged can easily be counted among them, if their interests are well and clearly articulated by an organization.

In doing so, one sees that the processes for promoting the welfare for aged tend to be similar in type as those required in the political system as a whole. This means, to give you an example, that in Holland the welfare of the aged will be more fragmented than in Germany, and in the U.S.A. more so than in Britain. The whole tradition of political and administrative thinking is geared that way.

If this is true - and I firmly think it is, simply because it fits in solidly with the national culture - it can be predicted that the future will bring changes in these countries. Britain is clearly "fragmenting" and the U.S.A. is "uniting", and this presents possibilities for manoeuvering and anticipating, whatever the case may be. In all countries there is room for interest groups. Developed countries have shown that there is scope to organize them well and maintain regular and routinized relationships with the government.

From the point of view of the welfare of the aged, a certain danger exists in this possibility. It does happen that these relationships become habitual and are accepted by both sides as belonging to the established rules. Germany is a clear example, even to the point where, some time ago, a federal department placed a high-ranking civil servant at the disposal of a national, non-governmental social welfare agency to promote the welfare of the aged and, at the same time, continued to have that civil servant on its own payroll (the civil servant, by the way, did a splendid job).

But these kinds of relationships tend to a certain polite conservationism which may not be in the interest of the aged. The great trick would be to require a recognition from government without losing a healthy aggressiveness. This would be especially desireable in the case of the aged, because they cannot be expected to have the same critical attitude and revolutionary energy as younger people or trade-unionists, who would more easily tell their representatives in high organizational echelons that their activities are not any more desired, when they are dissatisfied.

V SOME COMMENTS ON SERVICES

Part of the activities of a non-governmental agency for the aged is to provide services to their clients and to appeal directly to society through public relations and by publicizing its aims and programs. As long as I can remember, we have always discussed the relative roles of governmental and non-governmental agencies in this field., but I have never found that discussion particularly useful for an international body. The political and cultural traditions of countries are too different to draw more than very general and vague conclusions. Scandinavian countries for instance have little scope for non-governmental services of any kind; Switzerland has more scope. Neither Scandinavia nor Switzerland will fundementally change in the foreseeable future.

Everybody nowadays agrees that both types of services are respectable and, in the meantime, every country has its own concept and definition of what precisely is governmental and non-governmental, voluntary and professional, trained and untrained. Only the latter of the three, trained and untrained, is really debatable and presents a serious issue, notably in the field of the aged.

It is sufficient to say that the three pairs of contrasts should never be confused with one another and that they should be seen in a sort of three-dimensional system of possibilities , where every pair can be correlated with the two other pairs. Thus, we can have non-governmental agencies with some services that employ trained and untrained volunteers as well as non-governmental agencies that employ trained and untrained professionals. And the same is true for governmental agencies. Tasks should be allocated to workers

according to sensible criteria such as financial possibilities and standard of performance.

Services have changed over the past 10 - 20 years. They have expanded, intensified, specialized. They have met with the same problems as other services in cognate fields - problems of centralization and decentralization, generalizing and specializing, training, finance, organization. But there are two aspects specific to services to the aged, which I would like to mention here.

(a) Buying Power

The aged have proved to be a marketable group of people, or rather their buying power is an object of marketing techniques. In our competitive consumption society, it is only natural that consumers may aim for the best conditions. Aged people are now consumers - consumers particularly of special housing facilities, medical services, insurance policies, cultural services, transportation, recreation in several forms. It is only fair for organizations for the aged to enter into consumer bargaining and do it in the greatest possible style. After all, bargaining power is "power", and every bit of power which the aged population has access to should be effectively used.

It is especially in this connection that the membership-type of non-governmental organization is in its element. It is a perfectly appropriate function for this type of organization. Nobody, not even big international concerns such as the pharmaceutical industry, can afford to underestimate a properly organized and mobilized organization of the aged people themselves.

(b) Self-Determination in Employment

The other point I want to mention here is something which is not so much a service as the promotion of an idea. We go rather far in acknowledging the fact that particular groups of the population have their own particular interests. We are also inclined to agree that these groups have the right to formulate these interests and have them discussed. We call that democratic morality. In order to achieve democratic morality, the general public has to be influenced and brought into contact with the group interests.

In the case of the aged, we meet with a strange situation. It is a generally recognized right that every individual has, in principle, a right to self-determination. It is true that this right is subject to certain limitations in the general interest, but benevolent trusteeship and paternalism are not very popular nowadays and, consequently, senior citizens have the same recognized right of self-determination.

But there is an important difference. Normally, a decision in a person's life has to do with a situation which has consequences for the future. In other words the factor of time is significant. Change, time, future, three words for the same thing, are a dimension in society and in individual life. This factor "time" has a meaning for the aged which is different from that for the non-aged. Everybody knows that the emotional repercussions of time change, more than once, in different stages of life. Aged people shake hands with time. This makes the whole subject of time a tricky and delicate one, more so than it is for other age categories.

The first basic decision of the oldest part of the population is whether or not to remain productive in the conventional sense. This is a time-decision, usually taken for the aged and not by the aged. One is up here against the trade-unions, especially in times where labor is scarce and manpower is plentiful. It is the famous question of the compulsory retirement age and we all know the ramifications and bitterness of some of the fights.

This particular time is economically not very favorable for changing the situation in the developed countries of the West, but it must be said that from a value point of view, the times have never been better because of the change in public conscience. We know about partial solutions such as looking for non-risk bearing jobs or creating non-competitive positions. They do not however, solve the basic issue, which remains that the aged should be able to make their own decisions without being hindered by rigid chronological age constraints.

This is worth a fight and the fight can only come from a coalition of all the organizations for the aged, notably the non-governmental ones, because governmental agencies have as a rule to be careful in not alienating the rights of younger people entering the marketplace at a time when work is not guaranteed for everybody.

(c) Self Determination in Life

There is, however, yet a more basic issue where time and future get full emphasis, when life itself is in discussion. To decide on life itself is the most crucial of all issues and almost always controversial. Important groups of people, religious as well as professional, think that decisions about life and death do not fall within the competence of human beings, whatever the background of such decisions. Such points of view can only be deemed to be worthy of respect and they have a special relevance for the aged, particularly when the average life expectancy has increased to the extent that the majority of people die when they are aged.

The formulation of the rules for living and no longer living are not universal and not eternal. They were made at a time when people had a shorter life expectancy - and in general by people who were themselves not aged. They are to some extent varied and changeable, synchronically as well as diachronically. One can actually see that now in several parts of the world where euthanasia is a "hot issue"; it becomes even clearer if one discusses death and dying with different age groups in one society and sees how the attitude towards death changes from age group to age group.

Once again, a rigid attitude toward life and death is a respectable thing, but does that mean that everybody, including all the aged, have to be condemned to life until the scientifically very last moment? If some people think so, they must certainly act accordingly. But what if other people think differently? What if individual aged persons think differently much like Hamlet when he said "to die, to sleep - no more - and by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to".

Many aged people certainly think differently. Can the aged claim the right to make their own decisions in that case? I do not suggest that this is easy. I do not suggest that there are not many problems, such as the moment of decision, the capacity for second judgement, the closely connected problem of suicide etc. But that, I would be so bold as to say, is secondary. Of primary concern is the right of a person who is aged and who has, for that reason alone, a special relationship with death, to make his own decision. Isn't that a right to be seriously considered by non-governmental agencies in the field of the care of the aged? Isn't that kind of issue worthy of a basic standpoint in principle, in the context of so many other struggles for self determination that are being fought all over the world?

VI. SUMMARY

In summing up the points I have tried to make, the following scheme may serve:

The system "care for the aged" can be broken up in a number of sub-systems composed of several categories:

A. Governmental agencies
   (a) general agencies, which have, inter-alia, aged as clients
   (b) special agencies for the aged

B. Non-governmental agencies
   (a) membership organizations of the aged
   (b) service organizations for the aged

C. Coordinating agencies for the field of the aged

These agencies meet problems in fields of content (I) and in fields of organization, administration, planning and strategy (II)

Under I., we meet many specific problems in the fields of health, housing, social security, culture, but some are basic in our society and have to do with self-determination and self-defense.

As far as II. is concerned, it would be possible to develop a systemized body of knowledge which provides rules for the administration and strategy of the conglomerate of agencies for the aged. This paper tried to indicate what sort of factors have to be taken into account when formulating rules of strategy for bringing the struggle for adequate resources for the aged to a reasonable outcome. In that struggle there is a special and important role for the coordinating national body. But certainly also for associations of the aged. In this respect, I finish with quoting once again this paper's motto by Dylan Thomas: "Old age should burn and rave at close of Day".

ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY AGENCY IN EFFECTING SOCIAL CHANGE

ON BEHALF OF THE AGING

by

Bernard E. Nash,
President of the International Federation on Ageing
and former
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I. THE VOLUNTARY AGENCY AS AN ADVOCATE OF SOCIAL CHANGE

In the social field we normally think of private voluntary organizations in terms of service delivery agencies. For the purpose of discussing such private organizations as agents of change, I would ask you to consider a different model. It is not a unique model; indeed, it has a longer historical tradition than the service delivery model. I am of course thinking of the type of organization which was referred to in Professor Beekman's paper. For example, the church in its early days as a non-governmental organization provided massive social leadership to improve the quality of life of individuals.

Or the model of the original guild and trade associations and trade unions, and the professional associations model if you will, such as the manufacturers' association, the medical societies, the petroleum associations, and so forth. They view their role as either agents of change for society as a whole or for the good of a specific membership.

Their role is that of investigation of facts and needs; they analyze the situation; they perform an educational activity; they engage in public relations or propaganda, if you will; they serve as experts to those who have neither the time nor the inclination to become experts in the need for change in a given area.

Now each of these organizations, whether it be a trade union or a trade society, or a professional group inclined to bring about change for their organization or their profession, assume that decision makers and the power structure do not have either the sensitivity or the desire to bring about change, or the knowledge necessary of the needed change. And they also assume that these organizations and decision-makers are not equipped to do the necessary backgrcund work to make appropriate decisions that the agent of change would want them to make. They think a certain shift in power is essential if change is to take place. The degree of shift will depend upon their sense of urgency and their particular philosophy.

Perhaps by using this model it will help to better envisage the points that I wish to now make, although I hasten to add tnat we do not deny the significant capacity of the service delivery agency to institute and to effect change. Indeed, I will address that subject as well.

II. CHANGE IN THE WORLD TODAY

We can be certain of one thing: Change has always been a part of the human condition. What is different now is that the pace of change is growing faster and faster, affecting every part of our lives. The acceleration is so swift that our age takes on a significance that few ages of the past have had.

We agree that we cannot do anything to alter what has already happened. And the present is so fleeting that it is transformed into the past as quickly as we touch it. So it is only the future that is amenable to our plans and actions. And yet, few governments will devote significant resources to long-range planning.

We accept these premises; yet we often act as if we do not really believe them. As Alvin Toffler has said in his book Horizon, "The fact is...that even the most educated people today operate on the assumption that society is relatively static. At best, they attempt to plan by making straight-line projections of present trends. The result is unreadiness to meet the future when it artives. In short, 'future shock.'"

If we are to avoid the trauma of "future shock," we must examine the forces of change around us, try to understand how they originated, and search out the directions they are likely to take. Private non-governmental groups are traditionally the outgrowth of an early awareness of change by a few individuals. Further, when governments engage in the study of change they are at best basically oriented to the quantitative rather than the qualitative impact of a situation.

Change, of course, can be measured in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The use of the steam engine, for example, or the electrical generator can be measured in quantitative terms -- obviously in terms of coal consumption, steam pressure, kilowatts produced per hour, and so forth.

But change also has qualitative effects which if we are to be agents of change, each must understand. The steam engine and the electrical generator brought about amazing changes that affected the quality of life for nearly every one. Or take another example. At one time it was accepted wisdom that the earth was the center of the universe around which the sun and the planets revolved. And then we discovered that the earth is but one planet in a solar system, which, in turn, is but a speck in the vastness of the universe. The earth and the sun and the universe had not changed. Only our knowledge -- our way of thinking about them -- had changed. And thus it is in coping with social issues.

But at what point does this knowledge that we have become converted to social action -- the issue to which we are dedicated? Does the government show leadership at this point? Not very often. It is up to the private, non-profit, voluntary organization to provide the leadership in this conversion - at least to provide stimulation to the government to put new knowledge to action.

As we look to the future and think about the number of people who will inhabit this globe, we should think in qualitative as well as quantitative terms. Arnold Toynbee gets to the heart of the meaning of the population explosion

when he says, "The issue is indeed, a religious one in the sense that it raises the question, 'What is the true end of man'? Is it to populate the earth with the maximum number of human beings ... or is it to enable human beings to lead the best kind of life that the spiritual limitations of human nature allow?"

Trying to find the answers to that question will shape all of our futures. But it hardly is feasible that governmental bodies will undertake such a study. Further, scientists state their role is to create or to explain for the most part - not to act. Who, then shall lead? There is a place for the private organization in social action.

We have had an industrial revolution, which came about first in England and Western Europe and has been proceeding apace in the nations of the so-called developing world. We now have the technological skills to do virtually anything we wish to do. We know how to produce more food from a given acre or hectare of land; we know how to control the number of births in a family; we know how to build the machines that will supplant human labor and increase man's productivity a hundred or a thousand fold. Man is becoming obsolete as a producer. He is needed more now as a consumer of this earth.

There will continue to be refinements in our technological system. But our lack today is not technology. It is rather a lack of the means to apply this technology and, more importantly, a lack of social and cultural values to enable us to live at peace with one another and to improve the quality of life for everyone who dwells on this tiny, whirling globe.

And these shortcomings are even more critical when applied to the changing age profile of today's world.

I submit that what we most desperately need is a revolution in social values that would affect the old and the young alike.

This revolution will not be easy to achieve, and may never be achieved in its totality, but is worth striving for. It is only the non-governmental group which can lead such a movement. I hope I do not sound as though I am attacking government. I am a product of more years in government than out of government. I am only trying to establish priorities of who takes on what responsibility. It is a revolution that gives paramount value, not to the number of automobiles or television sets we own, but to such intangibles as respect for the individual, human dignity, and self-fulfillment.

To bring about the social revolution that I visualize will require a mixture of idealism and practicality. Thus, it will require the combined group of the young, with their great idealism and their challenge to change the world, and the old who look and say "With the time I yet have left, I would like to leave a heritage of which I am proud." And this combined group has the greatest potential for success, if such objectives are to be sought and achieved.

III. THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY AGENCY

Voluntary agencies in all of our countries have a crucial and seminal role to play in social revolution, for they have a freedom to innovate, and the flexibility of operation denied to a government agency. Let me enumerate these

advantages: They can be leaders and catalysts for social change because they are freer to experiment with new ideas and venture into unchartered fields; they can act more rapidly because of less cumbersome internal bureaucracy and controls; they can operate programs more cheaply through reliance on a volunteer network, and because of an extensive use of volunteers, they often have an intimate, first-hand knowledge of the needs and desires of their clientele. As a result, people tend to place more trust and reliance in voluntary agencies than in government departments. One sees this so often in social welfare work. When the government worker enters a home there is suspicion, a fear of loss of rights; whereas the representative of the private agency does not inspire this fear, no matter what his true role is.

The private agency can often intervene successfully with governments in the role of advocate, or when necessary, as irritant. It can combine the two roles, if the situation calls for it in order to force government to be more responsible and responsive. It can act as a community mobilizer involving the citizenry in ways that are not open to government departments - because that too often is considered to be the formation of a pressure group. And the private agency can, of course, form a coalittion for special action or for response to special problems.

It is equally evident that governments have a far greater reserve of power to effect change. They too have their strength and weaknesses, sometimes far beyond those of the voluntary group. The voluntary agencies' weaknesses are in many cases the mirror image of government's strengths. They suffer from the lack of legal authority which the government has to legislate change and to enforce that legislation. They suffer from a limited constituency which does not carry a powerful mandate. The private agency suffers from inadequate funds and resources and the power to raise such funds through taxation, which government has. They suffer from complete dependence on membership for financial support and leadership. They suffer from the need to engage in a continual education process for its members as that membership changes. And of course, most of all, the private agency is most sensitive and vulnerable to external events, much more so than a governmental agency.

The private agency must be effective in preparing the society for changes in values and in practice. If we communicate effectively that the changes are necessary, the other side of the coin must be that the government has the effective responsibility for the universal implementation of such changes.

Voluntary agencies, often working in close collaboration with government, can bring about not only change to improve the quality of life of the older person, but also help the older person to adapt to changing social and economic conditions. How many of you have suffered the problem of working very hard for a change in legislation, or the creation of a resource, a program, a service in your agency, and then not have those who need this service come and use it because of failure of knowledge to know it is available or failure to know how to use it?

A. How does the Voluntary Agency Effect Social Change?

Let us review the more practical and the immediate roles of the non-governmental organizations in effecting social change. I have been giving you something of the philosophical base. The trend toward urbanization, for example, is

having a profound effect upon the lives of many older persons in virtually every country of the world. I am told that in India the joint family system, though still functioning in rural agricultural areas, is breaking down in large metropolitan areas such as Calcutta and Bombay. The manual laborer cannot afford to maintain a lodging in the city that would accommodate his wife, children and parents. So frequently he leaves his family behind in the village, and tries to earn enough to send them some money and to visit them occasionally.

A study made by Charlotte Ikels, a doctoral candidate in anthropology, (University of Hawaii), reveals that a similar trend is taking place in Hong Kong and concluded that an increasing number of both young and old do not expect to be members of three-generation households. Even before the event, you see, the culture is changing, the value, the expectation is changing. And so what is believed to be the case shall become the case of the future.

Not only the social scientist but the action - and service-oriented voluntary agency must analyze the forces that are creating change in society. And they must seek ways to help older persons adapt to the changing environment. I fear sometimes that we are so action-oriented that we do not have the time to analyze, to look to those forces, those barriers, those values which are in fact counterproductive in our society. And we, in fact, reinforce some of those counterproductive values and actions. For example, what is the impact of technology, of urbanization, of increased education on the lives of older citizens? We talk about the older worker as being quite competent, quite loyal, in fact better in some capacities than the young worker, but our practice does not reflect what we say we believe. To what extent can the skills and the energy of the older worker themselves be used to bring about change that is socially desirable and to minimize change that is socially undersirable? Have we truly explored the capacity of the older member of our society to be an effective instrument of change?

In any action program, I suggest that we need first to determine the principal needs of a given community or society. Is it housing that is in short supply? Is it a lack of highways or sewers? Is it a nutrition problem?? Once we have defined the needs, we can then build a plan of action to meet those needs. And frequently, if we involve the clients themselves in this, a movement we know as community development, rather than the longer-range community organization process, then we can, in fact, bring about some needed changes.

If planning is to achieve results, non-governmental agencies and non-governmental agents must be able to gain the support of community leaders and have competence in community action skills. These skills are understanding the strategies, tactics, techniques, and the resources that are available to the voluntary agency.

B. The Continuum of Strategies:

One of the most popular approaches that we see used in social change is the organized militant protest demonstrated by those who consider themselves outside the system. Studies of these groups show that their frustration is with the system, but they do not know how the system works and so they feel that their only course of action is to tear down the system rather than study the system and work with it.

A second approach is that of systems analysis. This approach is normally undertaken by those within the system. The former, the militant action, is the more revolutionary effort, focusing on more immediate change rather than developmental objectives. The systems analysis approach, on the other hand attempts to analyze objectively the barriers and weaknesses in a system, communicates this analysis to persons or groups with power to effect change, and then shares resources with those power groups. Now this latter point is very important - to share resources, to share responsibility for the change and the side effects that the change might bring. The protest approach usually involves much public visibility and tends to pit one segment of the community against another in the effort to bring about change. And this, of course, has its counterproductive effects. It is counterproductive in the long-run for it tends to split rather than to integrate and to unify. It splits the special interest group from society, when in fact what you are trying to do is to have it receive its fair share of the resources of the society and be a part of the whole.

Each tactic has its proper time and place. One is no better than the other in given conditions. Each should be seen as tools and should not become ends in themselves. Too frequently this is the greatest problem of social movements; the technique becomes the real end. The time is spent on how to organize , maneuver, develop strategies, overcome trick, and the end result becomes lost in the process. One of the greatest pitfalls facing the leaders of voluntary agencies is that their zeal or the pressure from their constituency results in realizing specific objectives as quickly as possible; this may cause them to neglect the building of a solid foundation on which significant longer-range change can be built. This is unfortunate for goverment staff is by nature also oriented to specific rather than more lasting or universal ch change. They respond to the here and now.

I have spoken of the protest method of achieving change and of the systems analysis approach. Actually, for those who specialize in community organization and community development, there is a continuum of tactical choices open to us as agents of social change. The continuum, if you would draw a line and look at this, would involve certain essential steps, each of which has a whole body of knowledge that we must learn if they are to be useful instruments in our kit of tools to bring about change.

On the one side of this continuum might be informing - information giving. The next stage in the continuum might be educating, using knowledge for a specific objective. The next step might be community development, the organizing of the affected groups of the community itself into a self-help kind of movement that would bring about change. The next step would involve community organization where you organize the power and the status and the moneyed elements of the community to determine needs and establish solutions for those needs. Then you would go clear over to the other side of the continuum to the more aggressive side or the element of law, of legislation, to bring about a change that is a more permanent and specific in nature. This would be the continuum of strategies that we might address.

An example of this movement along the continuum might be found in the United States Surgeon General's report on the hazards of cigarette smoking. At first,

there was the gathering of information, and the research was followed by the dissemination of this information (the research findings). This was not too effective and so shortly thereafter, the government embarked upon a campaign of education to educate the public that cigarette smoking was harmful to one's health. There was a period in 1965 and 1966 where there was indeed a very significant drop as the result of an aroused and educated citizenry beginning to act in its own behalf. This effort was not sufficient, and so groups began to organize and fought for legislation in which radio and television advertising of cigarettes was prohibited by law and cigarette packages had to carry a printed warning that smoking is deemed hazardous to one's health. This legislation was passed in the U.S.

C. Relationships with Government:

Just as there are different political and economic structures in the world, ther will be differences in the way voluntary agencies operate and are financed. Some organizations may be largely dependent upon government grants but still feel free to criticize the government. Other voluntary agencies may be entirely financed by private contributions. And there are, of course, the type of agencies in which the political element, in fact, organizes the social group as its arm, offering certain beneficial changes or promises of change in exchange for their vote at the proper moment.

There are different degrees of partnership between voluntary agencies and governmental agencies in various parts of the world, but I consider it essential that the voluntary agency assume as one of its roles the monitoring of government actions under whatever structure. This is critical. Too frequently we find that we work for legislation but once it is passed, we allow the actual operation of the legislation to be removed from the voluntary agency's control or at least from its supervision. That is a great loss indeed.

Today many governments recognize the value of the private agency's serving as a monitoring agent. Great Britain has a parliamentary commissioner who investigates complaints referred to him by members of Parliament. In countries where ombudsmen do not exist, voluntary agencies can unofficially assume the role of representing older citizens who feel they have a justifiable complaint.

Indeed, in the Associations I represented in the United States, we have a unit to deal with the complaints - not only the complaints of our members, but complaints that are received by members of Congress which are transmitted to us and upon which we will act. We will intervene on behalf of the Congressman for his constituent. This in turn results in another trade-off between the agency and the decision-maker, whom we will at some point ask to bring about a change in the law or in administration of policy, because these complaints represent the need for such change.

In the United States, for example, we have something like 23,000 nursing homes where about one million older Americans suffering from physical or mental infirmities reside. These homes are operated by private entrepreneurs, and the average cost per patient is about $600 per month. The total cost of these nursing homes is about $7.5 billion a year, of which about $4 billion is paid by the government - just slightly over half. The voluntary sector is indeed very much involved and concerned with the standards of care and the cost of care in these facilities.

A study recently published by the United States Congress documents many abuses and deficiencies in the management of nursing homes. Among the abuses cited were a shortage of registered nurses, the overuse of medication (particularly tranquilizers), rebates which pharmacists pay to operators of nursing homes for drug purchases, poor sanitation and fire hazards, physical and psychological abuse of patients, overcharging for patients' care, and lax inspection by state agencies.

Clearly, this is a situation demanding corrective action. The private associations representing older Americans are concerned; they are bringing pressures to bear on public officials and operators of nursing homes. But perhaps they are not fulfilling completely the role they should assume as ombudsmen for the elderly.

As a matter of fact, a recent survey made by the United States Government indicates that about 25 percent of all older patients in our hospitals and nursing homes have no medical reason for being there. They are in hospitals or nursing homes for lack of less expensive services that could be provided to the elderly in their homes.

The need for more homemaker-home help services is not limited solely to the United States. Dr. Virginia C. Little, a professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut, took off a year from teaching to study social services for the elderly in 20 countries of Asia, Africa and Europe. She was particularly interested in home-delivered services for the aged.

In many countries she visited, the idea of home-help, homemaker, in-home services is gradually catching on. She pointed out that services for the elderly do not exist in isolation, but are part of a range of institution-based and community-based programs. The most organized services in the Asia-West Pacific region are those of Japan, where respect for the aged remains relatively high and the aged are more integrated into the family, the work force, and the community than in other industrialized nations. Services have begun in Hong Kong, led by two private agencies. Singapore has a token service in its Welfare Department and is giving high priority to assisting and setting standards for private homes for the aged. The Philippines Thailand and Burma she found, have provided some model homes for the aged and destitute but have left other services to the informal sector. Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Indonesia have no visible home-delivered services, but do have private homes for the aged. Voluntary women's groups are seeking to organize home services in Iran. Kenya has a program of home economics education operated by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Professor Little makes two points with which I think we can agree. First, in any country there is a need to raise the level of consciousness as regards the needs of the elderly. Second, any home-delivered service should fit the cultural, social, and communications patterns of the society it seeks to serve. If people walk, the service will be on foot. If communication is informal, by word of mouth, so should the services be arranged to the culture, but the concept would be universal.

In Europe, Canada, the United States, and in some other countries, we have historically relied on volunteers to come forward to define a need and to

institute services to satisfy that need, but in most developing countries the government will have to take the lead in initiating services for the aged - that is until such time when the concept of the volunteer can be communicated and organized in those countries. And if the services are to be effective, part-time workers may need to be paid at a rate consonant with wage levels of the country. Developing countries should profit from the mistakes made in Europe and the United States; we need to communicate with others what these mistakes are and not just brag about our successes. We must start anew with approaches tied to the level of economic development of the country.

Developing countries characteristically have a good share of their population that is unemployed or underemployed. The problem is to devise means to utilize this resource for the mutual benefit of the aged and the underemployed and unemployed.

Voluntary agencies can train and supervise cadres of paraprofessionals and volunteers. Voluntary agencies can provide valuable services or act as the catalysts to mobilize and coordinate available services. Voluntary agencies should not be mere followers, but should play a dynamic role in the formation of social politics aimed at making life more meaningful for the elderly. This applies particularly to our efforts to influence national or regional legislation. I put emphasis upon regional for we have found that we have far more effective change taking place in influencing state and local statutes and governmental practices than we have at the national level.

If we are to schieve a revolution in social values, particularly as those values affect the lives of older persons, we must be pragmatists as well as idealists. We must recognize that much of what we wish to accomplish can be obtained only through legislation, and that our legislative goals cannot be achieved without public support. Unless the landowners, and businessmen, the professional people, and the skilled artisan accept the thesis that social services for the elderly are desirable and are willing to pay taxes for those services, affirmative action is not likely to be taken by national or provincial legislatures. Voluntary agencies, therefore, have a very real educational role to play.

You know your own legislative goals, and you know much better than I how to achieve them. In the United States, voluntary agencies support a broad range of objectives. We contend that comprehensive quality health care should be available to all Americans regardless of age, regardless of ability to pay. And the older persons united are seeking change not only for themselves but for the broader society. This is a new kind of movement that I think has great significance for us to study and to understand.

We turn to government agencies as the basic source of services for the elderly, but we should not forget that we can accomplish a great deal through self-help and through the concerted action of voluntary agencies. Let me give you one example from the United States.

Since 1968, a community agency in the city of Minneapolis called the Minneapolis Age and Opportunity Center has been providing supportive services to help elderly people stay in their own homes rather than being forced into

hospitals or nursing homes. The center is funded through voluntary and government agencies and by private donors. It provides a wide range of service to older Minneapolis residents -- home-delivered meals, home health care, housekeeping and personal care, handyman service, transportation to medical clinics, and legal services. Many of these services are performed by older citizens themselves, some as unpaid volunteers, others as paid part-time workers. The Center also operates its own medical clinic in cooperation with a local hospital. The overall objective, which is being achieved, is to help older persons maintain the maximum possible independence.

IV. THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION ON AGEING

I would like to conclude by giving you a little more of the background and history on the International Federation on Ageing because it serves somewhat in the capacity of the National Council -- only it is an International Council -- as was described in Professor Beekman's paper. Although the situation varies from country to country, the forces of modernization and development are almost universally requiring social intervention into what has traditionally been a family problem. Services have been devised to meet the needs of people in many countries around the world, but often on an ad hoc, non-integrated and widely scattered basis. There are few nations which can assure their older members security, social fulfillment and personal dignity until the end of their lives, and all three of these elements are critical to our understanding. We frequently address the issues of poverty of means, lack of income, housing, health facilities, etc. Only more recently are we beginning to address the poverty of meaning in older persons lives, and it is difficult for government to address that particular issue. Many aged persons still end their lives in poverty, solitude and neglect -- and this happens in industrialized societies as well as in the developing ones.

Given this broad range of problems for the elderly, we concluded that national associations of the elderly and those providing services to the aged had much to learn from each other and that they needed an association that would serve as an international clearinghouse and an international spokesman, if you will, at the United Nations and in other councils. Delegates from 17 national organizations in four continents met in London in 1973 to establish the International Federation on Ageing and to draw up its constitution.

Although other international geriatric and gerontological groups are in existence, they are primarily concerned with the scientific and the academic aspects of aging. The International Federation on Ageing, therefore, is primarily interested in the translation and the application of such knowledge to the practical conditions and problems and lifestyles of older persons.

The International Federation is dedicated to change. That is, to the ideals of improving the status and the quality of life of older persons around the world. We have a mission to educate, to sensitize, to stimulate constructive action. We accept the responsibility of acquainting world and national leaders with dimensions of problems facing the elderly, and not only in those countries which are members, but also those countries which are seeking to develop necessary programs and movements.

Our publication, Ageing International, is serving as an international clearing-house to communicate information about actions being taken to benefit older persons around the world, and we would invite you to submit freely and frequently information you feel would be of value to your professional cohorts in other parts of the world. We wish to use our publication as a vehicle for the presentation of innovative ideas from the scientific community -- ideas from the community of practice -- ideas to which government agencies and social workers can react. We have published a handbook on the status of home help services for the aging around the world which can be useful for developing countries that wish to initiate home health services whithin limited budgets and for developed countries considering an expansion of their present services.

We have held two stimulating symposia in Nairobi, and now we meet here to exchange ideas and to chart our future course. In a relatively brief period, the IFA has had solid accomplishments, but we should accept the challenge of things to be. We know that the proportion of older persons in the world's population is steadily growing. According to the United Nations' report, the number of persons in the world age 60 and older is expected to double between the period of 1970 - 2000. Will we be able to help them to lead satisfying lives with a sense of dignity, or will the lot of the elderly become even worse than it is today? Will we give some direction to change or will we be the victims of change?

One challenge is to increase IFA's effectiveness in working with international bodies, particularly with the United Nations and its member organizations, such as the International Labor Organization, the World Health Organization, and UNESCO. We can help these organizations focus more sharply on the needs of older persons around the world. Our Federation has endorsed the convening of a World Assembly on Aging, possibly under the aegis of the United Nations, which would bring together governments in a cooperative venture to determine what kinds of commitments can be made to their aging populations. No action has been taken to convene this kind of World Assembly. I feel this is a matter that should be given high priority at this conference, the conference of the International Association of Gerontology, and others that you may be conducting in your own homeland.

Virtually no movement for the betterment of mankind has been started on a large scale. Most have been started by one or two dedicated individuals who have had an idea that sparks the imagination of others and enlists their support. The International Federation on Ageing is still in its formative stage, but we can gain in influence and make our voices heard around the world if we continue to generate the enthusiasm which presently exists.

V. CONCLUSION

I have stated the view that we need to bring about a revolution in social values. I realize no single formula can be applied in all countries; we must work within the parameters of our cultures and our traditions. I have said too, that change is inevitable and that it is moving at a fantastic pace. We need to ask the question: What can we do to direct the forces of change into constructive rather than destructive channels?

Some observers have a gloomy view of the future. In their opinion, slums will get worse, social tensions will increase, the environment will be further polluted, natural resources will be squandered, and the high birth rate in some areas will bring wide-spread starvation.

I take a more optimistic view. We have the knowledge and the technology to enhance the quality of life for persons around the world. What we need is the commitment.

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